

WHAT IT TAKES TO ACHIEVE

Managerial Success



Four facets of emotional intelligence epitomize the necessary competencies.

BY DANIEL GOLEMAN

The most common mistake I hear about in newly promoted managers is trying to succeed as a leader the way they succeeded as individual contributors. What we now know is that individual success tends to come from self-motivation and self-management, while managerial success is the result of emotional intelligence (EI) and several essential social competencies.

Competencies successful leaders have in common

I once gave a talk to the top 100 or so leaders of a global manufacturing company, where I was tasked to make the case for EI as the active ingredient in great leadership. Prior to my lecture, I asked the head of HR to send me the company's competence model—its analysis of what made a leader successful at the company. I have seen many such models, and have noticed a strong pattern when it comes to the top leaders: 80 percent to 90 percent of the competencies that distinguish star leaders typically are built on EI.

Self-assurance, for example, often shows up in these models. Self-assurance in one's own abilities—based on a realistic understanding of your own strengths and weaknesses—requires self-awareness, which is the first domain of EI.

Another common ingredient of leadership success is the ability to remain calm under pressure. That requires self-management—the second facet of EI—and one that builds on self-awareness. Other common self-management competencies include the drive to meet goals, adaptability, and initiative.

And all great leaders have the ability to communicate effectively. This requires empathy, which is the third part of EI. There are two kinds of empathy. One is cognitive empathy, understanding how others think about the world. The second, emotional empathy, is understanding immediately how another person feels. This helps leaders fine-tune what they say for positive impact.

These two kinds of empathy are essential for rapport and chemistry with others; we use them in all our relationships. But in our fast-paced world with back-to-back meetings and endless incoming messages, many leaders don't pay attention to the person in front of them. When leaders are assessed by their colleagues on the EI competencies needed for high performance, poor listening often shows up.

Thankfully, all these EI competencies can be improved with practice. That's the point of assessing them, so leaders can track how they improve.

The fourth aspect of EI is relationship skills. Here common competencies for outstanding performance include teamwork and collaboration, influence, and helping others build their leadership abilities.

So when I looked at the competence model of that manufacturing company, what did I find? About 80 percent to 90 percent of the abilities the company had independently de-

termined make leaders high performing were based on these EI competencies. Some were purely cognitive, such as analytic abilities. But because our emotional state determines our cognitive efficiency, even those methodical skills indirectly depend on EI.

The importance of self-management

Many people assume that academic ability should predict how well we do in life, but it doesn't.

Studies at the University of Pennsylvania have found that students who aren't naturally gifted with the highest IQs in their class but score high marks share a quality called "grit." These kids keep plugging away despite setbacks.

The abilities to delay gratification in pursuit of goals, maintain impulse control, manage upsetting emotions, hold focus, and possess a desire to learn are referred to collectively as cognitive control. Grit requires cognitive control. And both grit and cognitive control are examples of self-management.

IQ and technical skills matter, of course; they are important threshold abilities, what you need to get the job done as an individual contributor. But everyone you compete with at work has those same skill sets.

It's the distinguishing competencies that are the crucial factor in the success of a leader, the variables that you find only in the star per-



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formers—and those are largely due to EI.

These human skills include, for instance, confidence, striving for goals despite setbacks, staying cool under pressure, harmony and collaboration, persuasion, and influence. Those are the kinds of competencies companies use to identify their star performers. And in competence models, they show up about twice as often as do purely cognitive skills (IQ or technical abilities) for jobs of all kinds.

Thus it's your expertise and intelligence that get you the job, but it's your EI that makes you a successful leader.

Recognizing the shining stars

The distinguishing competencies that set star leaders apart from mediocre leaders are based on four main skill sets: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. What follows is a generic breakdown (though any given company may place more value on some than on others).

Self-awareness:

- emotional self-awareness—leaders high in emotional self-awareness recognize how their feelings affect them and their job performance.
- accurate self-assessment—leaders with accurate self-assessment know when to ask for help and where to focus in cultivating new leadership strengths.
- self-confidence—self-confident leaders often have a sense of presence, a self-assurance that lets them stand out in a group.

Self-management:

- self-control—leaders with emotional self-control find ways to stay calm and clear-headed under high stress or during a crisis.
- transparency—such leaders openly admit mistakes or faults, and confront unethical behavior in others rather than turn a blind eye.
- adaptability—leaders who are adaptable can juggle multiple demands without losing their focus or energy, and are comfortable with the inevitable ambiguities of organizational life.

- achievement—leaders with strength in achievement have high personal standards that drive them to constantly seek performance improvements, both for themselves and those they lead.
- initiative—such a leader does not hesitate to cut through red tape, or even bend the rules, when necessary to create better possibilities for the future.
- optimism—a leader who is optimistic can roll with the punches, seeing an opportunity rather than a threat or a setback.

Social awareness:

- empathy—such leaders listen attentively and can grasp the other person's perspective.
- organizational awareness—a leader with a keen social awareness can understand the political forces at work in an organization, as well as the guiding values and unspoken rules that operate among people there.
- service—leaders high in the service competence foster an emotional climate so that people directly in touch with the customer or client will keep the relationship on the right track.

Relationship management:

- inspiration—such leaders offer a sense of common purpose beyond the day-to-day tasks, making work exciting.
- influence—indicators of a leader's powers of influence range from finding just the right appeal for a given listener to knowing how to build buy-in from key people and a network of support for an initiative.
- developing others—leaders who are adept at cultivating people's abilities show a genuine interest in those they are helping along, understanding their goals, strengths, and weaknesses.
- change catalysts—leaders who can effect change are able to recognize the need for the change, challenge the status quo, and champion the new order.
- conflict management—leaders who manage conflicts best are able to surface the conflict, acknowledge the feelings and views of all sides, and then redirect the energy toward a shared ideal.

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- teamwork and collaboration—leaders who are able team players draw others into active, enthusiastic commitment to the collective effort, and build spirit and identity.

So how do we spot these qualities on the job? The Emotional and Social Competency Inventory, a 360-degree tool measuring emotional and social intelligence, evaluates these competencies.

Boosting social intelligence

Is it possible to enhance social intelligence? Yes it is, through the right training.

Take “Janice” for example, a top executive who had been hired as a marketing manager by a Fortune 500 company. She was chosen for her industry know-how, strategic planning skills, and clear communication style. But within Janice’s first six months on the job, she was struggling. Her peers felt she was confrontational, lacking sensitivity for organizational politics, and unwise about how she handled upper-level management.

To help this promising manager, Janice’s boss called in a leadership coach who immediately put Janice through a comprehensive evaluation. Janice’s direct reports, peers, and managers all scored her low on managing conflicts, empathy, service skills, and flexibility. The coach was able to find out more by having off-the-record talks with those who worked directly with Janice.

Their feedback focused mainly on her failure to establish connection with people or even acknowledge their reactions to her. Overall, Janice could not read the social cues of a group nor could she recognize people’s emotional cues. Even more risky to her own success, Janice did not realize she was being too brusque in dealing with upper management. When she had a major difference of opinion with a manager, she didn’t know when to recede.

When the coach shared this feedback, Janice was understandably upset that her performance could put her job in danger. More upsetting was the realization that she was not having her intended effect on others.

The coach developed training sessions

during which Janice would explain her daily accomplishments and disappointments. The more Janice reflected and talked about these moments, the more adept she became at seeing the distinction between sharing her professional opinion and reacting aggressively. She also began to predict how others would respond to her in a meeting or when receiving her negative feedback, and practiced more careful methods for presenting her opinions.

As an exercise, Janice was asked to identify someone at her company with exceptional social intelligence expertise. She chose a veteran senior manager who was an expert both in respectful critique and at dissenting without harming his connections with others.

Janice asked this senior manager to coach her and transferred to a position where she could work with him. Janice’s mentor trained her in the best methods for sharing her opinion about controversial topics at meetings and how to communicate better with her superiors. He also taught her, by example, the fine art of performance feedback.

Through her daily contact with him, Janice discovered how to encourage people even when she was disputing their ideas or critically assessing their work.

This mentorship offered Janice the chance to experience, internalize, and eventually emulate what she observed. Researchers have even established that this type of bond is not just autonomous minds responding consciously or unconsciously to each other; instead, the minds are essentially fused into one system. In this way, the best leaders are those whose actions and performance influence the brain’s system of interconnectedness.

Being a great leader is less about handling circumstances and people proficiently, and more about knowing how to—and truly wanting to—create an encouraging environment for those people whose collaboration you need.

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